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SUGGESTIONS

OF

A PLAN OF ORGANIZATION

FOR

FREED LABOR,

AND

THE LEASING OF PLANTATIONS

ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER,

UNDER A BUREAU OR COMMISSION TO BE APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

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ACCOMPANYING A REPORT PRESENTED TO THE WESTERN  
SANITARY COMMISSION

By JAMES E. YEATMAN,

*President of the Commission, Dec. 17, 1863.*

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ST. LOUIS, MO.:  
ROOMS WESTERN SANITARY COMMISSION,  
No. 10 North Fifth Street.  
1864.

# SUGGESTIONS.

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1. Commissioners for leasing abandoned plantations should be employed to lease them within certain districts, not having the districts so large but what a personal supervision can be given by each Commissioner, requiring that they should visit the plantations under their direction at least four times during the year. No Commissioner, or the son, or near relative of a Commissioner, should be allowed to lease a plantation within the district of said Commissioner. Liberal salaries should be paid to these Commissioners, and they not be allowed to speculate or engage in other business, either directly or indirectly, while they continue in office.

2. No lessee should be allowed to lease more than *one* plantation; and encouragement should be given for leasing small parcels of ground, say from one to two hundred acres, so as to induce our small farmers, loyal men from the Western and Northern States, to come in and lease such bodies of land. Such encouragement would tend to settle the country with a loyal and industrious population, who would protect it and develop its full resources more completely, and result in a better care of the colored laborers on the soil.

3. Plantations should at first only be leased for one year. After the first year, three months' notice should be given by a lessee of his desire to re-lease his plantation. Other applications may also be made for the same. Where there are more applicants than one, notice shall be given to applicants; and to the one paying the highest premium above the terms of the lease, it shall be given. After the first year, the party leasing shall have the preference for three years; at the end of which time, it shall be subject to a new leasing, or such other disposition as may be ordered by the Government. The rent for a plantation shall be, for every bale of cotton raised upon it, eight dollars per bale of 400 pounds, or two cents per pound, and five cents per bushel on every bushel of corn; of this, one-quarter shall go

for the establishment of schools for the colored people; one-quarter for the support of the Infirmary Farms for the aged, the young and helpless, and the remaining two-quarters shall be paid into the Treasury of the United States through its appropriate agents, the Commissioners seeing that the proper collections are made and accounted for. Parcels of ground shall also be leased to the freedmen who may make application, and who can show their ability to stock and work a plantation; and this class of lessees shall be under the same rules and regulations as those governing all other lessees.

4. Infirmary Farms should be established, and Superintendents for them appointed, at convenient locations, which farms shall be places:

First. For receiving and registering the names of all the freed people in the District.

Second. As Homes for the aged and infirm negroes, and young, motherless children, who are unable to perform labor, and who will have to be maintained by the authorities out of the tax imposed for that purpose.

Third. Planters, farmers, and other contractors, requiring laborers, shall make application to the Superintendent of these farms, who shall furnish such as may be required. Persons taking father or mother, must take with them such children or near relatives as may be dependent upon them, and may desire to go. No negro shall be obliged to go with any person against his or her will. All over the ages of twelve years will be required to labor.

5. Laborers should be graded by the Superintendent of the Infirmary Farms, according to their ability, as No. one, two, or three—men, women, and children between the ages of twelve and fifteen years. The minimum price for laborers shall be: For No. 1 men, \$25; for No. 2 men, \$20; for No. 3 men, \$15; for No. 1 women, \$20; No. 2 women, \$16, and No. 3, \$12; and children between the ages of twelve and fifteen years shall be ranked as No. 3 of male or female, according to their sex.

6. The Superintendent of Infirmary Farms, and such Assistants as he may need, should be appointed by the Bureau or Commissioners of Plantations. The Superintendents should be persons of intelligence, integrity and humanity, who shall act as Justices of the Peace, and shall decide all points of difference between the employer and employed, and see that strict justice and im-

partiality is meted to both. They should be paid by fixed salaries, and be prohibited from engaging in other business.

Persons wishing hands should make application for the same to the Superintendents of Infirmary Farms, stating the number of acres they have to cultivate. They should be required to employ one able-bodied hand, of the class No. 1, to each twelve acres of land, and should not have more than three-fourths of the land in cotton, and of other hands in proportion to the class employed, so as not to overwork their laborers.

7. When the person wanting laborers shall have made his selection, lists should be made out, and the employer and employee should each sign a contract, those not being able to write to make their mark, and one or two persons shall witness the same. The contract should be in duplicate, the lessee taking one copy, and the Superintendent of the Infirmary Farm retaining the other on file. At the end of the year or period of time for which the said contract was made, the lessee should return the hands, or account for them, and a full settlement should then be made, he paying to his hands such balance, in cash, as may be due; and no cotton should be sold or shipped without notification to the Superintendent of the Infirmary Farms, whose duty it should be to see that the pay of the laborers is secured and fully provided for.

8. Parties having freedmen employed should allow to each family of four to six persons, one-half an acre of ground for garden purposes. Lessees should furnish good and sufficient quarters for their laborers, constructed with proper regard to sanitary conditions.

9. The lessees should provide a sufficient supply of good, wholesome food, and clothing, which should be sold to the laborers at cost price, by invoice, and ten per cent thereon, which will be sufficient to pay transportation, waste and labor of disbursement, keeping an account with their laborers, and settling with them on the payment of their wages.

10. The negro should receive full wages for his labor, *by the month*, he to pay for his own food and clothing. Labor by the month should not to be computed by the day. The business of the lessee is to furnish labor for every day, Sundays excepted, and the risk of bad weather or other interruption of his work should be his. If a man does not labor daily, with industry, a deduction may be made from his monthly pay; or laborers feigning

sickness, where the same may be clearly shown, may have a proportionate reduction made from their wages. Where laborers are sick for a longer period than five days, the loss should fall mutually on both employer and employee, that is, but half wages should be paid. When sick for a longer period than one month no wages should be allowed beyond that period.

11. Where laborers become worthless, from bad temper, or laziness, or cannot be governed, they may be discharged by application to the Superintendent of the Infirmary Farm, if he should so adjudge, after examining into all the facts of the case, and giving to both parties a hearing. When deductions are claimed for loss of time by indisposition to work, or feigned sickness, the same should be reported to the Superintendent of the Infirmary Farm, so that an investigation can be made in regard to it, and allowed or disallowed as the justice of the case may require. If a statement is not furnished during the month, or within three days after the end of each month, then no such claim should be considered.

12. Where the lessee fails to furnish a proper supply of food or clothing to meet the wants of his employees, or does not furnish proper quarters, or overtasks his laborers, or otherwise abuses them, or violates his agreement, they should have the right to appeal to the Superintendent of the Infirmary Farm, who should have the same corrected, or release them from their contract; the lessee being required to pay all wages due, and be held responsible for half wages until other employment can be obtained.

13. There should be employment provided either on the Infirmary Farms, or other places, for all who are able to work. The wages on these farms should only be one-half what it is on the leased plantations, the object being to encourage labor on regular farms. The Infirmary Farms are only intended for the support of the infirm, the helpless, and for young orphan children.

14. There should be vagrant laws to govern and regulate those who are unwilling to perform labor, to be established by the Bureau or Commissioners of Plantations. Laborers should, if possible, be paid in full monthly; but as parties working plantations or farms are supposed to rely upon the product of crops, in some degree, for means to pay for labor, provisions, &c., lessees should only be required to pay half the monthly wages, either in money, provisions or clothing, until the crops are sold. The

first lien upon the crops should be for the wages of the laborer, and provision will be made by the Superintendent to secure the prompt payment of the same. If there is danger that the laborers will be defrauded out of their wages, a sufficient portion of the crop, before it is sold, may be attached by the Superintendent, on complaint of the laborer, to secure his wages, and may be sold by the Superintendent, at market value, for this purpose.

15. The Superintendent, or one of his aids, shall, from time to time, examine invoices of planters and charges made to laborers, to see that they are not overcharged for goods. They are also to acquaint themselves with wholesale market prices in the different cities in which purchases are made.

16. Provision should be made to give prompt payment to those employed on Government Infirmary Farms, or in chopping wood or performing other labor for the Government or its agents.

17. All persons who are employed should support themselves and their families, and should not be a charge on the Government. The freedmen should be encouraged to make for themselves permanent homes, and provision be made for them to purchase homesteads, and to cultivate farms on their own account.

18. The use of the lash, paddle, and all other cruel modes of punishment, should not to be permitted or inflicted by the lessees, or any one in their employment, upon the persons of any of the employees or their families.

19. There should be schools established in convenient localities, and all children between the ages of six and twelve years should be required to attend them.

20. The rights of marriage and of the family should be established, and where persons have been living together as husband and wife without being married, they should be required to be legally married. They should also be required to assume a family name, and registers of births, marriages and deaths should be kept.

21. Each laborer should be furnished with a descriptive roll, showing with whom he has hired, and his character given either by his last employer, or the last Superintendent of the district in which he resides.

22. Medical attendants for districts should be employed, who shall be paid by a tax of \$2.00 per annum on each laborer in the district.

23. Since the President's recent proclamation of pardon to

repentant rebels, on certain conditions, I would recommend that all persons who have remained on their plantations and fully accepted the terms of said proclamation, shall be allowed to retain possession of the same. All, however, who have abandoned them, and followed the rebel armies, and who may return and take oath as prescribed, should not be entitled to the possession of their lands, where they have been leased under this system, until after the expiration of the period for which they have have leased, but they may be allowed the \$4.00 per bale reserved for Government purposes, and they may also lease other abandoned plantations upon the same terms as other lessees.